



Online tracking is cutting down on meth making

Brian Smith
Register News Writer

March 24, 2009

The recent decision to link pharmacies in two Indiana border counties to Kentucky's "MethCheck" computerized system for tracking pseudoephedrine purchases should have a deterrent effect on meth production in Madison County, Sheriff Nelson O'Donnell said.

"I think definitely it'll deter people here," O'Donnell said.

MethCheck is a computerized system which allows law enforcement officers to track purchases of products containing pseudoephedrine, a key component in manufacturing methamphetamine, no matter where they occur in the state. "What used to take us days to do, we can do in five minutes," Central Kentucky Area Drug Task Force Director Rick Johnson said.

The system, which was instituted in July 2008, replaced paper record-keeping of pseudoephedrine purchases. "It allows us to look at the logs without driving to the pharmacy and digging through paperwork," Johnson said.

The system records each time a driver's license is scanned as part of a pseudoephedrine purchase, and keeps track of the amount of the drug a person has purchased.

Federal law restricts purchases of the drug to nine grams in a 30-day period, and the system will deny a sale if the purchase would exceed that limit.

Johnson said that in the first nine months since MethCheck was instituted statewide, more than 850,000 sales have been logged, and more than 13,000 sales that would have violated state and federal laws were prevented. "That's more than 44,000 grams that could have been diverted to manufacturing methamphetamine," Johnson said. "A standard box of pseudoephedrine, a common cold medicine, contains 2.4 grams of the drug," Johnson said. "If taken as recommended every 12 hours, that box would last 12 days," Johnson said.

The Internet-based system allows law enforcement officers to log on and search for individuals suspected of making meth. "Now, if we get a tip, we can check them out and get verification of their purchases," O'Donnell said.

Johnson said the task force saw a drop in meth labs following the start of the MethCheck program, but active labs have become more common since the start of the year, a change O'Donnell blamed on the economy. "I think it's the economy," O'Donnell said. "All the items you need are easily accessible, and the only problem is with the Sudafed. "If you can bake a cake, you can make meth," O'Donnell said. "These people are looking for another source of income."

Johnson attributed the increase in labs to the addiction itself. "I think the addiction is what's fueling the purchases," Johnson said. "I don't think a lot of people think we're looking at it."

O'Donnell said drug addiction and its effect on crime in general is a major reason behind his department's focus on drug trafficking. "The reason I'm so aggressive on drugs is because of the effect on other crimes like burglary, robbery, bad checks, everything. It all goes back to getting dope.

"If they're going to cook meth in Madison County, we're going to actively and aggressively send them elsewhere or to prison," O'Donnell said.